

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### PURPOSE AND NEED

The Monument Resource Management Plan (RMP) is being prepared to provide the Bureau of Land Management, Shoshone District Office with a comprehensive framework for managing 1,178,989 acres of BLM-administered public land over the next 15 to 20 years. With increasing demands for various resources, prudent stewardship of the public lands simply can no longer be accomplished without comprehensive land use planning. This document contains a final environmental impact statement (EIS) which addresses a proposed RMP, three other alternative RMPs, and one sub-alternative. Each of the RMP alternatives reflect key public land issues identified through public participation. The proposed RMP reflects BLM's effort to resolve resource conflicts and ensure that the public lands are managed in accordance with the principles of multiple use and sustained yield.

The Monument RMP is being prepared under authority of and in accordance with Sections 201 and 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (Public Law 94-579, FLPMA). Further, pursuant to Section 603 of FLPMA, this document analyzes preliminary wilderness suitability recommendations for six wilderness study areas (WSAs) located within the planning area boundary. For these WSAs, this document will make only preliminary recommendations as to their suitability or nonsuitability for inclusion into the National Wilderness Preservation System. These recommendations will be reported through the Director of the BLM, the Secretary of Interior, and the President to Congress. The final decision on suitability or nonsuitability of the WSAs will be made by Congress.

This document also serves as the instrument to satisfy the intent of the 1975 U. S. District Court approved agreement (Case #1983-73) between BLM and the Natural Resources Defense Council, et al., in which BLM agreed to consider the impacts of various intensities of livestock grazing in its decision making process. With livestock grazing being identified as one of the planning issues, it is logical it be analyzed through this land use plan and consider the NRDC/BLM agreement.

The draft EIS is designed and intended to aid Bureau officials in the final selection of a resource management plan. The EIS further satisfies the intent of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), 40 CFR Part 1500. The intent of the CEQ regulations is to "ensure environmental information is available to public officials and citizens before decisions are made and before actions are taken." When finalized, the EIS will provide an environmental analysis of the approved RMP which may be referenced for future activity planning and project implementation associated with the RMP.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING AREA

The Monument Planning Area encompasses 2,059,441 acres north of the Snake River in southcentral Idaho. It includes all of Jerome and Minidoka counties and portions of Gooding, Lincoln, Blaine, Butte, and Power counties. The area is generally bounded by Bliss on the west, American Falls on the east, the Snake River on the south, and Craters of the Moon National Monument on the north. Of the 2,059,441 acres, 57 percent (1,178,989 acres) is public land administered by BLM, 2 percent (39,576 acres) is public land administered by other Federal agencies, 3 percent (65,932 acres) is land belonging to the State of Idaho, and 38 percent (774,944 acres) is privately owned land.

The planning area is divided between two resource areas. The Bennett Hills Resource Area contains 179,926 acres of public land administered by BLM west of the Gooding-Milner Canal and the Monument Resource Area has 999,063 acres.

The map at the beginning of the Summary section of this document shows the general location of the area. Map 1, in the back of the document, shows the land status.

## PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process described in BLM Planning Regulations 43 CFR 1600 contains nine steps.

### 1. Identification of Issues

Each BLM resource area has different problems, needs, and resource uses. At the very beginning of the planning process, the BLM listens to citizens' suggestions regarding development and protection of the area's resources. These issues then become important to the planning effort and will be considered in each step of the process. At this step, the BLM needs the public to help determine the issues and their importance. The issues and conflicts are not resolved at this step, but it is important for the BLM to hear specific comments.

### 2. Development of Planning Criteria

Once the issues have been identified, the District Manager prepares criteria to guide development of the plan. These criteria are used to guide the gathering of information and, later, to evaluate alternatives. The criteria are published for public comment before they are adopted by the District Manager.

### 3. Inventory and Information Collection

The BLM planning team needs to know the present condition of the resources in the area and their past production levels. The District Manager arranges for the district staff to collect and assemble this information. BLM appreciates public contributions of information.

### 4. Analysis of the Management Situation

The planning team assesses the capability of the public land resources to respond to the needs, concerns, and opportunities previously identified through public participation. The BLM policy and the policies, plans, and programs of other federal agencies, state and local governments, and Indian tribes also play a role in this analysis. The Analysis of the Management Situation for the Monument Planning Area is located in the Shoshone District Office.

### 5. Formulation of the Alternatives

Several alternative plans are prepared that will range from emphasizing production of resources to favoring protection of resources, including continuation of present management. Each alternative must be a complete plan for managing the resources in the planning area. The public comments help identify conflicts among the alternatives.

### 6. Effects of the Alternatives

The BLM interdisciplinary team analyzes the physical, biological, economic, and social effects of implementing each alternative. The environmental effects of the alternatives must be discussed and the relationship between short term uses of the environment and long term productivity analyzed during this step.

### 7. Selection of a Preferred Alternative

Alternatives and their effects are evaluated according to the planning criteria developed in Step 2. The District Manager then selects a preferred alternative based on information and analysis developed up to this point in the planning process. This alternative is included in the draft plan and draft environmental impact statement which are presented to the public. It is important for the public to participate in the review and comment period at this time. This draft RMP/EIS identifies BLM's preferred alternative.

### 8. Selection of the Resource Management Plan

After evaluation of comments received on the draft plan and draft environmental impact statement, the District Manager selects a proposed Resource Management Plan. If the proposed plan is not within the range of the alternatives in the draft plan, and the environmental effects are significantly different, a new draft plan must be prepared. After review and concurrence, including a review by the Governor for consistency with State or local plans, policies, or programs, the State Director approves the final plan and environmental impact statement.

#### 9. Monitoring and Evaluation

Once the plan is approved by the State Director it is then time to begin carrying it out. The BLM requests funding to implement the plan and schedules a review of the plan every five years. The review determines whether mitigating measures are effective, whether environmental limits have been exceeded, whether other federal, state, or local plans have changed, or whether there is new data of significance to the plan. Monitoring studies begin as soon as possible and are used, along with initial inventory data, to sustain or modify use adjustments. These studies will be conducted on a recurring basis. Monitoring and evaluation reports are available for public review.

#### 10. Maintenance, Amendment, and Revision

Resource Management Plans will be maintained to reflect minor changes in data and further refinement or documentation of the approved plan. Maintenance will not result in expansion of the scope of resource use or restrictions, or changes in the terms, conditions or decisions of the approved plan. Maintenance does not require formal public involvement, interagency coordination, or the preparation of NEPA documents.

When changes are required beyond maintenance, the RMP must be amended in accordance with the BLM planning regulations. Amendments will include the NEPA process to determine environmental impacts, public involvement, interagency coordination, and consistency determinations as required by the regulations.

When conditions change that affect the entire plan or major portions of the plan, then the plan will be revised using the regulations required for the preparation of a new plan.

### ISSUES

#### Lands - Retention or Disposal

The most discussed issue in the Monument Planning Area is the amount of land that should be made private through sales, Desert Land Entry, or Carey Act. This issue was discussed by two major groups: those favoring the development of additional agricultural lands; and the present users of the public lands, livestock operators, sportsmen, ORV users, etc., opposing further development. Of particular concern was the Lake Walcott area with erosive soils where it was feared that agricultural development would cause increased wind erosion. This could cause off-site damage to fences, roads, and reduced productivity of adjoining lands.

Questions to be Answered

1. Which lands should be made available for agricultural development?
2. Should lands with severe erosion hazards in the Lake Walcott area be developed for agriculture?
3. Which lands should be retained for livestock movement purposes between allotments?
4. Should isolated parcels of public lands in agricultural areas be retained for wildlife habitat values?
5. Which lands should be available for private and State exchanges?
6. What access should be provided to public lands?

Wilderness

Wilderness is a very emotional issue. Public comments either supported as much wilderness as possible, or said there is no need for more wilderness of any kind. Both of these opinions were expressed frequently.

Questions to be Answered

1. Which wilderness study areas should be recommended suitable for wilderness designation?

Livestock Grazing

As most of the planning area has been grazed by livestock for a long time, there was concern with the grazing levels of particular allotments. In addition, there was concern that the maximum potential for livestock forage production was not adequate. The decline of the sheep industry has created a concern that the historic sheep use areas be converted to cattle use.

*Issues*  
*Livestock Grazing*

Questions to be Answered

1. What is the current carrying capacity of allotments for livestock grazing?
2. Which allotments will have intensive management through the development of allotment management plans or coordinated resource management plans?
3. Will conversions from sheep AUMs to cattle AUMs be allowed and what will be the rate of conversion?
4. What seasons of use for livestock grazing will be allowed?
5. Are there areas where there should be no livestock grazing?

Range Improvements

The center of this issue is the perceived need for additional brush control by the livestock industry. Wildlife support groups are concerned that too much brush removal would be damaging to wildlife habitat. Livestock operators are also interested in additional improvements, such as fences or wells, that are needed to improve livestock management.

Questions to be Answered

1. How much brush control and seeding will be completed?
2. What will be the constraints on brush control and seeding?
3. What other improvements are needed to improve livestock management?

Fire Management

The Monument Planning Area has a very large average annual acreage burned by wildfire, thus perpetuating the cheatgrass invasion. Repeated burns are significantly reducing sagebrush over a large portion of the planning area. This issue is particularly important to wildlife habitat management. In addition, there are adverse impacts to soil and livestock grazing.

Questions to be Answered

1. How can the size and frequency of wildfires be reduced to lessen impacts on wildlife habitat, soil erosion, and livestock grazing?
2. How will prescribed fire be used?

Soil Erosion

Although soil erosion is a very localized problem within the planning area, there is much concern as to the possibility of increased wind erosion from the high erosion potential areas. The area north of Lake Walcott is of particular concern. The focus was on potential wind erosion caused by development of new farm land in high erosion-susceptible areas.

Questions to be Answered

1. Will agricultural development cause accelerated wind erosion in the fragile soils in the Lake Walcott area?
2. Will resource uses cause accelerated erosion in the future on erosion-susceptible areas?

Wildlife Habitat Management

Wildlife habitat is an important part of the public land resources within the planning area. This area contains habitat for deer, antelope, sage grouse, burrowing owls and long-billed curlew (both sensitive species), Shoshone sculpin (sensitive species), ferruginous hawk and Swainson's hawk (both candidate species for threatened status), and other wildlife. In addition, there is concern for the maintenance and protection of riparian areas.

Questions to be Answered

1. Which public lands should be retained and managed for terrestrial wildlife habitat?

*Issues*  
*Wildlife Habitat Management*

2. What actions will be taken to manage wildlife habitat?
3. What riparian areas should be protected?
4. How should habitat for sensitive, threatened and endangered, and candidate wildlife and plant species be managed?

Minerals

The principle mineral concern was expressed by local government for the need for material for road building. This planning area contains only limited quantities of mineral materials suitable for road construction. In addition, there was a concern as to whether any lands should be restricted to mineral entry or mineral leasing.

Questions to be Answered

1. Which areas should be retained to provide mineral materials (sand, gravel, cinders, and top soil) for private and local and State government use?
2. Which areas should be retained because of locatable mineral values?
3. Should there be restrictions on oil, gas, and geothermal activities?

Lands for Local and State Governments and Other Needs

The need for lands, particularly for land fills, but also other needs, was identified by local government. There are limited areas with suitable soils for land fills. In addition, there was concern expressed about the existing National Guard training areas. There are numerous other potential uses, particularly rights-of-way for powerlines, communication sites, roads, and low-head hydro-power projects.

Questions to be Answered

1. Which lands should be made available for local government needs such as land fills, parks, and flood control?



2. Should the National Guard be allowed to use areas for military training?
3. Should other uses be allowed, such as hydro-power plants, roads, and powerlines?

#### Off-Road Vehicles (ORVs)

ORV use is concentrated in Jerome County near U.S. Highway 93 on the Snake River Canyon Rim and in the Lake Walcott area near American Falls. Light use occurs outside these areas. The major concern was on-going and potential resource damage.

#### Questions to be Answered

1. Should off-road vehicles be allowed to use the erosion-susceptible areas in the Lake Walcott area?
2. Should any areas be closed to ORV use?
3. Should specific ORV use areas be designated and/or developed?

#### Recreation

Recreation concerns generally centered within these areas: ORV (previously discussed); general recreation (hunting, sightseeing, nature study); areas of intensive recreation use; and unique areas. There was concern as to the impacts of the various actions and the reduction of recreational opportunities.

#### Questions to be Answered

1. Should areas be designated for intensive recreation use?
2. What unique areas should be protected?

## *Issues*

### *Cultural and Historic Resources*

#### Cultural and Historic Resources

There was a general interest in the protection and interpretation of the cultural and historic resources within the unit.

#### Questions to be Answered

1. Should areas be closed or restricted to other uses to protect cultural resources?

#### PLANNING CRITERIA

Planning criteria were prepared to guide development of the RMP. They indicate the factors and data that must be considered in making decisions. Ten general criteria were considered:

1. Social and Economic Values;
2. Plans, programs, and policies of other Federal agencies, State and local government, and Indian tribes;
3. Existing laws, regulations, and BLM policy;
4. Future needs and demands for existing or potential resource commodities and values;
5. Public input;
6. Public welfare and safety;
7. Past and present use of public and adjacent lands;
8. Public benefits of providing goods and services in relation to costs;
9. Quantity and quality of noncommodity resource values; and
10. Environmental impacts.

More detailed planning criteria can be obtained from the Idaho RMP Guidebook and the Monument Planning Area Planning Criteria. Both documents are available for review at the Shoshone District Office.

## SELECTIVE MANAGEMENT

Selective management, as applied to the rangeland program, is the categorization of grazing allotments into three management groups based upon similarities of resource characteristics, management needs, and economic and resource-based potential for rangeland improvement. All livestock grazing allotments have been categorized as "I" (Improvement Needed), "M" (Maintain), or "C" (Custodial Management) based upon the following criteria and additional criteria developed from issues specific to the Monument Planning Area.

### 1. "I" Category

Category "I" allotments presently include unsatisfactory conditions, have the greatest potential for improvement, and may present serious resource use conflicts.

### 2. "M" Category

Category "M" allotments are in satisfactory range condition, are producing near their identified potential, and have no known present or anticipated serious resource use conflicts.

### 3. "C" Category

Category "C" allotments usually include only small acreages of public land or lands classified for transfer from Federal ownership. These allotments do not present management problems, regardless of condition. They present no significant potential for increasing production. Resource conflicts are either nonexistent or are outweighed by other considerations.

The order of these categories as discussed above represents the relative order of priority for the investment in range improvements and conducting of range monitoring studies, subject to user contributions and further consultation. Selective Management within the rangeland program will provide a framework from which prudent expenditure of rangeland investments can be made, consistent with an approved land use plan.

Appendix D contains further discussion of selective management under "Implementation."

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The results of implementing the selected RMP will be examined periodically to inform the resource managers and public of the progress of the plan. The results being achieved under the plan will be compared with the plan objectives.

Monitoring and evaluation help the resource managers

- to determine whether an action is accomplishing the intended purpose,
- to determine whether mitigating measures are satisfactory,
- to determine if the decisions in the plan are being implemented,
- to determine if the related plans of other agencies, governments, or Indian tribes have changed, resulting in an inconsistency with the RMP,
- to identify any unanticipated or unpredictable effects, and
- to identify new data of significance to the plan.

The proposed monitoring and evaluation plan for the Monument RMP is shown in Appendix A. The plan specifies resource components to be monitored, how they will be monitored, where they will be monitored, the estimated cost of monitoring, and a suggested threshold level that will warrant a management concern. If future monitoring shows a variation from RMP objectives warranting management concern, the reasons for the variation will be examined closely. Modification of a RMP decision may be needed, or the variation may be due to factors beyond BLM's control, such as climatic or economic fluctuations.